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The Millennium of the Baptism of Rus' and Russian Self-awareness

by Edward L. Keenan

It is not premature to observe that, whatever *perestroika* means in the sphere of economic and institutional reform, or *glasnost* as concerns the etiquette of authorized utterance, a cultural revolution is taking place in certain spheres of Soviet Russian life. A limited circle of the cultural elite created by the Revolution and Stalinist reconstruction — a group marked by hereditary privilege, “Western” sophistication, exclusion from the Party political process, and social guilt¹ — has formed an unexpected and fragile alliance, with an equally small cohort of impatient practical Party politicians borne of the Khrushchev years, in an effort to dramatically transform Soviet life. They may succeed. Even if their revolution fails, there are some things that will, in our time, never be the same.

One of these is the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in public life. This will be clear to all by the end of this jubilee year, in which the Church celebrates the millennium of the traditional date of the “Baptism of Rus’.” The celebration will doubtless be taken as a convenient milestone marking the change. In a larger sense, however, it is clear that the millennial festivities provide only the outward signs of a long-term process of revival and rein-

vigoration of the Church, and of its return to significant participation in Russian political culture.²

In order to gain some impression of the nature of this process, and to understand its significance in the present anniversary year, one must pose basic questions about both the history of Christianity among the East Slavs and about the current celebrations: What, from a vantage point of some objective distance from both belief and politics, is the apparent meaning of the events of 988? What meaning is being imparted to those events by the organizers and participants in current celebrations, and why?

Mikhail Gorbachev declared, in the prepared opening soliloquy of his November interview with Tom Brokaw, that “we shall be marking the millen[n]ium of Christianity in Russia.”³ Such a striking indication of a change in the role of the Church is, however, just the most readily apparent manifestation of a process that has been under way for some time — a process whose roots and directions are still unclear and in some respects troubling. The wide-ranging and unprecedentedly public series of jubilee events and publications provides an occasion for taking note of this process and its implications for our understanding of social and political processes in the USSR.

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- 1 Some members of this readily-identifiable group, the children of “repressed” former officials and intellectuals, are also marked by the opposites of privilege and guilt, deprivation and virtue, which function similarly in this case.
 - 2 For a fuller discussion of some matters alluded to in these introductory paragraphs, see my “Muscovite Political Folkways,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 45, 1986, pp. 115-181 and “Reply,” *Ibid.*, Vol. 46, 1987, pp. 199-210.
 - 3 NBC News Special, “A Conversation with Mikhail Gorbachev,” November 30, 1987, p. 8. I quote from the English transcript provided by NBC. The whole passage — very interesting in a number of respects despite its obvious corruption — reads “The Soviet Union is a unique phenomenon. It’s a whole conglomeration of over a hundred nations and nationalities, and just try and imagine that behind us, behind every one of those peoples and nationalities which now make up the Soviet Union, and next year we shall be celebrating — we shall be marking the millenium [*sic*] of Christianity in Russia, but even before that the Kievan-Russ existed with a dynamically developing people, an original culture and wide ties with European nations.”



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At a minimum, Church and State (the latter as represented by the Academy of Sciences) have collaborated in the organization of three major international conferences inside the Soviet Union and one abroad. They have also worked together on a number of smaller meetings and on several publications, all devoted to serious rehabilitation, in the spirit of *glasnost'*, of the cultural and intellectual authority of the official Church. These meetings have been marked by a particularly warm spirit of mutual rediscovery. A participant described one to me with the Russian word *simfoniia* (concord).

In addition, a number of canonizations may take place, including that of the elusive icon painter Andrei Rublev. An earlier rumor had it that Havrylo Kostel'nyk, an active figure in the controversial "reunification" of the Ukrainian Uniate and Orthodox Churches, may be added to the list. It is not likely that the Moscow Patriarchate will follow the emigre Synodal Orthodox Church in canonizing Nicholas II, despite his growing popularity among the faithful in the USSR.

It has also been reported, on good authority, that Soviet officials responsible for the provision of hospital services in the city of Moscow have approached the Patriarchate with the suggestion that the Church take some role in the administration of hospitals in that city.

Finally, Soviet television recently broadcast the ceremonial transfer of a hoard of icons and other religious objects, allegedly confiscated from black marketeers and smugglers, from the "organs" to a representative of the Orthodox Church, during which a member of the security forces spoke of the "spiritual treasure of the Russian people" and ceremoniously shook the hand of the hierarch on camera.

To those familiar with the limitations that have been placed upon the activities of Orthodox and other believers in the Soviet Union in recent decades, some of this news would, only a few short years ago, have been all but unbelievable. Granted, over the last half-century or so there have been periods of somewhat ambiguous collaboration and a general movement toward greater freedom for the Church. But much of what is happening in this jubilee year is really quite astonishing — and puzzling.

What is going on? It should be obvious that what we are observing is not something that has been caused only by the advent of the millennium, nor is it limited to its celebration. Some of this news, presumably, can be explained by the general easing of censorship and government interference in cultural life with which we associate the term *glasnost'*. In the secular sphere, Russian cultural

life appears to be becoming more dynamic and *avant-garde* than it has been since the heady first two decades of this century. Indeed, the reports of cultural experimentation — including nudity and obscenity on Moscow stages — are reminiscent of certain aspects of Weimar culture and that of the American counter-culture of the 'sixties.

The Church (unlike some of its Western sisters) seems not to be taking part in this bacchanalia of modernism. Nor, despite some isolated calls from within, is it moving toward any internal *aggiornamento*. It is the least likely of Soviet institutions to be affected by *perestroika* because of the gerontocratic tendencies that are built into its traditional ways of selecting hierarchs. What we are observing may be brought to our attention because of *glasnost'*, but it is, if anything, a countervailing, conservative and traditional movement.

One can perhaps discern three processes of recent years that have become highly visible under new circumstances and in conjunction with the millennial celebrations: the intellectual and institutional reinvigoration of the Church; the reemergence of the Church as *the* national institution of Russians; and the reestablishment — or perhaps more precisely, the strengthening — of the political alliance between the hierarchy and the secular political authorities.

Reinvigoration

Visitors to the Soviet Union are no longer surprised to notice small signs of the renewed vigor of the institutional Church (larger and younger congregations; the obvious prosperity of operating churches) but few have commented upon the general and systemic revitalization of the last few decades. This vitality is apparent on every side.

The hierarchy is younger, more dynamic, better educated, more confident — in a word, gorbachevian. The seminaries are intellectually revived and now attract more able students (including foreigners, such as the Catalan Jesuit who recently earned a Th.D. at the Leningrad Academy). Libraries are being restored and publications planned. The chasm that once separated, say, the study of religious texts in the Academy of Sciences from similar activities in the seminaries and academies has all but disappeared.⁴ Church writers now display far greater familiarity with pre-revolutionary and foreign authorities.

Evidence of the material prosperity of the institutional church is congruent with these signs of intellectual vigor: it can be seen in the restored Danilov Monastery, in resanctified churches, in the austere prosperity of

⁴ See, for example, recent numbers of the *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, on the one hand, and G. M. Prokhorov, *Pamiatniki perevodnoi i russkoi literatury XIV-XV vekov*, L., 1987, on the other.

hierarchs' tables and residences and in their imported vestments.

It should be stressed that this revived Church is in many social and intellectual respects similar to the one before the Revolution. There is a high degree of hereditary membership in the clergy, including the clerical intelligentsia. In the rank and file, a preponderance of clerics are of provincial, if not rural, background.⁵

Moreover, religious writers of the pre-revolutionary period, whose names have long been suppressed, are now cited with approval in the increasingly bold and sophisticated church publications. It is hardly surprising for church intellectuals to reaffirm their tradition; nor should we be astounded that Soviet religious writers, like their secular counterparts, are trying to recover a portion of their heritage that was nearly lost because of censorship and suppression. Yet there are aspects of this general retrospective tendency — especially its selection of themes and authors — that are troublesome.

The National Church

The Orthodox Church is slowly recapturing a role in which it has often been cast by both well-wishers and enemies — that of the only authentically Russian national institution. Since the Russian Church has always been somewhat more of a “nation-Church” than analogous Western Churches, this development is hardly surprising. What catches the eye is the extent to which, in writings of both clerical and lay writers, issues of national self-awareness, national identity, and national destiny take on a religious coloration, and vice versa.

Such a pervasive and yet polymorphic trend must have many causes. These causes are varied and not easy to classify. All derive ultimately, as does so much of the dynamic of *perestroika*, from a broad assortment of dissatisfactions so long unexpressed that they may indeed have become inexpressible.

Some of these causal forces seem to be “intellectual,” or notional, in the sense that they can be represented as generalized conclusions made privately by some hypothetical plurality of Russians, such as:

- In a society that is determinedly multinational, no secular institution can be truly “national.”
- In a state that is avowedly atheistic, no state institution, however dominated it may be by Russians, can be authentically “Russian.”
- The Russian Orthodox Church — and it alone — can

be both national and Russian.

- The state has defiled not only churches, but the Russian countryside and the Russian family. The Church, which has always protected these things, can help us rebuild them.
- The Church has, to be sure, collaborated with the state — especially during the Great Fatherland War, our victory in which is the only achievement we will credit to the state — but as a rule it is virtuous and has suffered with us.
- Only the Church can help stamp out alcoholism and the hedonism of the young. The state, one way or the other, fosters them.

Related to the hope that the Church can indeed help with the solution of social problems is another conviction among Russians — a sense that drives them to reembrace the only Russian institution — that somehow Russians, when all is said and done, have suffered disproportionately in the fight for the new society. They feel that they have been taken advantage of by the very nations that, in the eyes of their critics, they have been oppressing. Arguments on this theme usually begin with unscientific accounts of the prosperity of, say, Georgians, and end with flourishes like “in the end only we — the Russians — have sacrificed our native language to the revolution. Soon the majority of speakers will have a non-Russian accent and no sense of proper usage.”

Some of these sociological perceptions are confirmed by statistical studies. Russians, despite their political domination of non-Russians, do live less well than several other groups in the USSR. Some of the indicators that have recently been published are quite striking. It is estimated, for example, that in terms of the level of “socio-cultural infrastructure,” Moscow is in the *third* decile among Soviet cities.⁶ Many regions of Central Asia have better infrastructures (e.g., electric power grids) than such heartland Russian areas as Pskov and Vladimir. The Caucasus and the Baltic have larger shares of students in their populations than do Russians. In Kazakhstan, where Kazakhs comprise only 16.5% of the urban population, 43% of the Doctors of Science, a very prestigious and lucrative post, are Kazakhs.

There can be little doubt that a continuation of *glasnost* will bring more such information to the ready imaginations of Russians. They will perceive that the government system that they have imposed upon others is now, in fact, oppressing them, and that in a number of cultural and every-day aspects, they face a kind of “crisis of Rus-

5 These are impressions; reliable statistical information is not easy to come by. It has been reported (private communication) that 55% of the students in seminaries are Ukrainian. On the make-up of the pre-revolutionary clergy, see Gregory L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth Century Russia: Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983.

6 This and the following details are taken from the round-table discussion, “Natsional'nye protsessy v SSSR: Itogi, tendentsii, problemy,” *Voprosy istorii*, 6, 1987, pp. 50-120.

sianness.” It should not be surprising under these circumstances that many Russians turn for consolation to the one major institution in which there are no Estonians or Georgians or Jews.

Another general cluster of causes of the “nationalization” of the Church — which, after all, claims in a sense to be part of an ecumenical church with a universal mission — is more traditional. Here I refer to those strains of Russian thought that have, consistently if differently in various ages, linked the “essence” of Russianness with Orthodoxy, and vice versa.

In one sense these traditional causes of the present trend are the determining ones. One could easily imagine — especially after seventy years of official and widely-practiced atheism — that the national feelings I have mentioned might take such non-religious forms as fascism, atheistic slavophilism, and the like. But the role of the Church as a national institution and handmaiden of the Russian nation-state, especially in such times of national distress as the Time of Troubles or the two World Wars, is so well established that the present combination of a sense of national discontent and the ability of the Church to provide traditional means of expressing such sentiments make its return to civic importance quite understandable.

Understandable, but not entirely comforting to the outside observer. The mythology to which the Church typically turns has been associated with expressions of xenophobia, authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism and anti-Semitism.

Now there may be an element of unfairness in assigning to the Church particular responsibility for trends that are widespread in Soviet society (and not unknown in our own), and more than an element of naiveté in expecting religious thought to be free of the faults that are so well documented in the declarations of other Russian organizations, such as the notorious *Pamiat'* society. At the same time, it is appropriate to point out that no small portion of the “text” being generated for the millennium by the newly-emboldened Church is little more than hoary national myth.

The History of the Church

It should be made clear that the history of the “Russian” Church is even more deeply enshrouded in mystery than are the histories of other “national” Christian churches, primarily because so little in the way of a written record has been preserved from the first half-millennium of Christian development among what were quite clearly scattered and primitive Christian communities of East Slavs.

The millennium we are celebrating is not only — some might say not even primarily — a “Russian” one. The

year 988 is traditionally accepted as the date of the official conversion of a pagan warrior of indeterminate ethnic origin called by some Valdemar, baptized as Vasillii, known today in Ukrainian as Volodymyr and in Russian and English as Vladimir. There is some argument about the precise circumstances of this event. But it is indisputable that just as the dynastic system Vladimir founded was the only one native to East Slavs until the threshold of modern times, so his embrace of the Bulgarian form of Byzantine Christianity determined ineradicably the liturgical, cultural and political orientations of East Slavic Christians. His was truly a historic action, the consequences of which reverberate to this day.

Vladimir was not a Russian as we understand the designation. The Russian speech community emerged later, far to the north and east, as the result of Slavic colonization and demographic growth in areas that were in Vladimir’s time sparsely settled by Finnic and Baltic peoples. Thus the millennium anniversary should celebrate the arrival of Christianity among the East Slavs, today represented by Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. Such is not the nature of the festivities. There are even reports that ceremonies were prohibited in Kiev — where the original conversion apparently took place.

That a shared anniversary such as that of East Slavic Christianity should become almost exclusively a Russian one is particularly surprising. Because of the post-war subordination of the Ukrainian Uniate and Orthodox churches to the authority of the Patriarch of Moscow, some fifty percent of Orthodox believers are Ukrainians (the majority of these, apparently, crypto-Uniates).

There is something historically anomalous in the leading role that the Patriarchate of Moscow is taking in these celebrations. In the context of the thousand-year history of East Slavic Christianity, the hegemony of Moscow and the Patriarch are relatively recent and in some sense atypical. Over the centuries since Vladimir’s conversion, a number of centers, in different periods and with the support of various secular princes, laid claim to the role of primary religious center: Kiev, later Polotsk in Byelorussia, Novgorod, Vladimir on the Kliazma, even (in the period of Tatar domination) the Golden Horde capital of Sarai, whose bishop’s special relationship with both the khans and with Constantinople was of crucial importance in Russian Church life. Moscow’s primacy in *Russian* church affairs and religious culture dates from only roughly the middle of the sixteenth century. The transition of Archbishop Makarii from Novgorod to Moscow in 1542 is a convenient marker.

The Russian Church was not traditionally a patriarchal church. It was for most of its existence a conciliar church, loosely governed by councils of bishops. The Patriarchate — founded in 1589, abolished in 1721, and reestablished

under Soviet rule — has existed only for roughly 200 of the thousand years of East Slavic Christianity.

Briefly put, East Slavic Orthodoxy as we know it — Moscow-centered, Russian-dominated and hierarchical in structure — is only in the most attenuated sense a direct heir of early East Slavic Christianity. The institutional Russian Church is in fact a rather modern creation. It was influenced heavily by post-Renaissance Greeks after the establishment of the Patriarchate, by post-Reformation Ukrainians in the seventeenth century, by Western post-Enlightenment impact in the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth, and (most profoundly) by Slavophile and anti-Enlightenment trends in the last century or so.

A fitting festival celebrating so rich a history should be a banquet of many dishes. Thus far the millennium has been heavy on starch and artificial coloring. It has been representative of only the last, primarily pre-revolutionary, period of the Church's life. Disappointing as that may be, the present celebration does provide an important glimpse into what may be the next period of the Church's life.

The Meaning of the Celebration

Characteristic of this jubilee message is a recent series of articles in the *Journal* of the Moscow Patriarchate by a leading clerical intellectual, Archbishop Filaret of Minsk and Byelorussia. The article appeared under the title, "The Baptism of Rus' and the Emergence of a Russian Self-awareness." Although the articles are brief, they contain some remarkable passages. Filaret writes:

*Only in the light of Christian teaching about humanity as an integral organism can one come close to a resolution of the question of the emergence of Russian national consciousness as linked to the adaptation of Christianity by our ancient forbears, that is, attempt to understand how a completely new conception of the essence, nature, and appointed role [naznachenie] of the Russian people was developed, and just how that self-awareness fostered the preservation of national unity during centuries of difficult ordeals. [emphasis added]*⁷

Students of Russian history will recognize the puzzle of the "essence and nature" of Russian national self-awareness that Metropolitan Filaret is trying to decipher, but may find his formulation unacceptable on its face because of the anachronistic nature of the notions being discussed, most of which arose centuries after the period in question. It is not true that the link between the adoption of Christianity and the rise of Russian national self-awareness can be viewed only in the light of Christian teaching about man as a whole organism. In addition, it was Filaret's "for-

bears" only in a very attenuated sense who embraced Christianity in 988.

Finally, as to "*naznachenie*." This is a difficult term to render in English. Its implication is that, by contrast with other populations, the "Russian" nation was brought to a new level of being in 988 and thereby acquired a preordained historical purpose. From there it is a short step to familiar and discredited notions about Russia's messianic responsibilities.

It is unclear to what extent, in early times, the organized Church or Orthodox belief was influential in shaping Russians' sense of themselves. Certainly in the Muscovite period — the "Russian" period *par excellence*, which Filaret, oddly enough, does not seem to like very much — Russians seem neither to have been particularly aware of the Kievan heritage and the importance of 988 nor particularly fussy about confessional politics. Of course, we can speak only of the leading groups, about whom some record has been preserved. But such seems to have been the case until roughly 1600; until, that is, the arrival of the first significant number of Greeks and Ukrainians, who, acting in their own interests, quickly convinced the Russians of the importance of such matters. Filaret's understanding of history does not embrace such details.

Filaret is a learned, careful and influential writer. His formulations are not made carelessly. So it is disquieting to read statements such as: "Having accepted Baptism, a nation is no longer susceptible to purely rationalistic ethnographic and anthropological analysis. It is a mystical organism, one that is analogous to the idea of the Church."

Even allowing full consideration for both the difficulties of describing "national character" and for the integrity of the author's religious belief, such a statement is unacceptable to any modern social scientist. It is also illogical. Are Japanese Buddhists susceptible to social-science analysis, but not Japanese Christians? Were "Russians" before 988, but not after? Soviet atheists, but not Soviet Christians? This thought is ominous in its implication that Russia is not to be understood by the rational mind.

Filaret quotes (from a recent Paris Orthodox publication) an address given just a century ago by V. O. Kliuchevskii at a convocation of his *alma mater*, the Moscow Divinity School. The quote is that the Church, "while educating the believer for the City of God, also gradually renews and restructures (*perestraivaet*) the city here below." Filaret goes on himself to declare that "This beneficent influence was particularly evident in the area of the formation of national Russian self-awareness."⁸ Kliuchevskii's remarks are probably true and were certain-

7 Filaret, Abp. of Minsk and Byelorussia, "Kreshchenie Rusi i stanovlenie russkogo natsional'nogo samosoznaniia," *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, 7, 1987, p. 46.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

ly appropriate to his occasion, the 900th anniversary of 988. But it is not clear that they have any relation to the problem — and it is a problem — of Russian national consciousness, which in any case Filaret never attempts to define. Indeed, how could one define it other than as “Russian other-awareness,” since in its origins and development, Russian self-awareness has always been determined at its root by Russians’ awareness of Western Europe, and more recently, the United States?

Filaret is most self-revealing in this respect when he declares that one “can return in many respects to the views of the older Slavophiles,” and quotes with approval I. V. Kireevskii’s well-known statement that:

Russia shone forth neither in the arts, nor in scientific inventions, as she did not have the time to develop autonomously in that respect and did not accept alien forms of development, which were based on a false view and therefore inimical to her Christian spirit. But as a compensation she preserved the first condition of a correct development, which required only time and favoring conditions: in Russia there lived and grew that organizing principle of knowledge, that Christian philosophy, which *alone* can provide a proper basis for the sciences.⁹

My objective is not to point out how obsolete, incorrect, and paradoxically Eurocentric these notions are. One might find similarly embarrassing passages in English, Continental, or American essays of the nineteenth century. But it is important to note the sources — among the possibilities presented by a rich and varied Russian intellectual tradition — that erudite ecclesiastics like Filaret are choosing to cite, as the Church, under their leadership, reemerges as an open participant in Russian civic dialogue.

The Relations of Church and Secular Power

Turning to the reestablishment or strengthening of the traditional relationship of collaboration between the hierarchy and the secular authorities, one must admit that, aside from anecdotal evidence of the type adduced at the beginning of this article, there is little information as to its present nature. But there should be little doubt that this relationship, under Gorbachev, has become much more important to both parties than it has been at any time since the ’forties, and perhaps even since the immediate post-revolutionary period.

The reasons for such a development seem clear. The present reformist leadership is pragmatic, and it needs allies. Among its highest priorities is the mobilization of the industrial working class (predominantly Russian and

Ukrainian), both in order to increase industrial productivity and as an ally against the bureaucracy of the *ancien regime*. Moreover, many of its objectives — the fight against alcohol and drugs, strengthening the family, disarmament — coincide with those of the Church.

For its part, the Church has reason to support *glasnost*’ and to encourage even greater openness. It has reason to form an alliance with sympathetic forces within the secular leadership against militant communists and bureaucrats, who through conviction or functional obduracy have stifled religious life. And the Church already has its base in the urban working class.

Finally, the extent to which nationalism, nostalgia, and other sentimental aspects of the matter play a role in the thinking of Gorbachev’s generation and entourage should not be disregarded.

The nature of this *rapprochement* is complex and probably not very clearly understood by either partner. Certainly some improvement in relations with the Church can help the leadership gain support in portions of the working class that might otherwise be alienated. But as indicated by the continuation of strict controls on preaching and building churches in working-class areas, the political leaders fear the power of a proletarian Church. Surely the Church can help divert some of the furious anti-semitism and populist rage that is released through *Pamiat*’. It is not clear, though, the extent to which the Church would be willing to turn against so populist and “Russian” a group, many of whose less virulent causes are popular with believers.

The Church, with state permission, could do a great deal to make Russians feel better about themselves in the multi-national Soviet state. The leadership, however, does not want to put itself in a situation in which — as in the case of the negotiations with the Katolikos over Nagorno-Karabakh — it must deal with the Patriarch as a representative of the Russian nation. Nor, in a time when it is desperate for better relations with the West, will it grant too much of a public forum to an organization that rejects (or claims to reject) most of what the post-Enlightenment West represents.

In view of the lack of authentic information about how these contradictions are being articulated, we can only speculate as to the nature of Church-state collaborations in the near term. But there should be no doubt that the Church will become an increasingly important factor in conventional Soviet politics.

How is the benevolent outsider to respond to these developments? What, in the first instance, should we make of the year-long celebration of the millennium? How are we to understand the resurgence of nationalism? Will relations between Church and state be antagonistic or col-

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71 [my emphasis].

laborative? If collaborative, will the results be beneficial or retrograde?

Our answers to these questions must in the nature of things be tentative, partial, and even contradictory. On the one hand, one should rejoice if religious belief and practice are again accorded some of the rights nominally provided for in the Soviet Constitution, and if believers can openly profess and practice their faiths without risking arbitrary and illegal deprivation of employment, housing, and the like. On the other, we note that for the most part the revival of religious life still is very tentative. Like the millennium itself, it seems for practical purposes to affect only the Russian Orthodox. There has been little change, and perhaps some deterioration, in the status of non-Orthodox Russians (especially Baptists and Jews, but Old Believers as well) and non-Russians (including Ukrainian Orthodox and Uniate communities).

On the positive side of the ledger, we rejoice to see the complex and rich cultural tradition of East Slavic Orthodoxy emerging into public discussion because of *glasnost'*. Some churches have been resanctified after decades as empty shells. The study of liturgies, sacred music, and medieval devotional literature is again possible within the seminaries and without.

At the same time it is not clear to what extent the revived Church will serve as a vehicle or sounding board for pent-up and self-renewing sentiments among those Russians who tend to express their dissatisfaction in primitive populist forms that are nationalistic, anti-Semitic, and anti-intellectual.

One welcomes the return of the official Church to a recognized position of social responsibility in a country in the midst of a social crisis. Particularly among the dominant Russian population, alcoholism, the erosion of family life, cynicism and spiritual desperation are having profound consequences.

Yet the recent examples of the Roman Catholic Church, the Rabbinate in Israel, and the Orthodox Church

in Greece have shown that the hierarchs of such institutions seem more devoted to the preservation of traditional values than to the generation of moral and ethical systems suitable for modern life. Indeed, the present spiritual predicament of the Russian half of the Soviet population points up an historical dilemma: The communities that have been most "rational" (i.e., able to mobilize the potentially destructive forces of society to productive ends), and have enjoyed great and enduring periods of stability and prosperity, have characteristically been founded at least nominally upon irrational religious beliefs and have been aided or dominated by some formal religious establishment. This is true not only with regard to the more familiar monotheistic states, but also of ancient pagan states (whose accomplishments, in cultural terms, were rather more astounding).

If we can without derogation characterize religious belief as irrational, we must also acknowledge that the practice of religion is often rational. The behavior of organized churches is characteristically pragmatic, especially when they are confronted with the cynical behavior of secular politicians. In the present situation in the Soviet Union, in the very celebration of the millennium itself, all of these behaviors are in evidence.

Such contradictory considerations have led many abroad to greet the millennium and the associated re-emergence of the Russian Orthodox Church with heartfelt confusion. It has been the purpose of these brief remarks to set forth some information and general considerations that might help to reduce that confusion, and perhaps even to transmute it into a kind of benevolent skepticism, as the consequences of Gorbachev's cultural revolution make themselves felt in the most complex and potentially volatile sphere of modern Soviet group psychology — Russian self-awareness.

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